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ABSTRACT

This booklet attempts to reassure single parents that they can raise healthy, happy children and provides some suggestions for parents' specific questions and concerns. The first section discusses the emotional stages children pass through when they lose a parent, ways to explain to children the loss of a parent, and ways to handle children's questions and feelings when they do not remember the absent parent. The second section deals with problems of daily living (child care, home chores, and budget management) and the special concerns of single mothers and fathers. The third section gives suggestions for handling problems within the nuclear family, such as disciplining children and adolescents, listening effectively to children, showing children affection, providing sleeping arrangements and privacy, and deciding whether the child has serious emotional problems. The fourth section gives suggestions for managing relationships with relatives, friends, dates, and community agencies. Particular types of single parents (unmarried mothers and fathers; divorced parents; widowed parents; single adoptive parents; and parents who have been separated from their spouses because of a job, illness, etc.) are given suggestions in the fifth section. The final two sections list community agencies and books that may be useful to single parents and their children. (CB)

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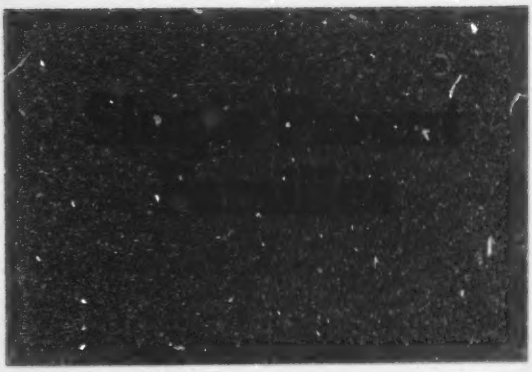

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Foreword

Today one out of five, or over 11 million, children are living in single parent families. Family experts are concerned about the special needs of such families, and some have feared there may be negative effects on a child's growth and development.

Although it should be emphasized there is no consistent evidence that single parents *per se* have more difficulties with their children than do other parents, many may have special questions and concerns.

This booklet recognizes that single parents—as all parents—are concerned about doing a good job. It recognizes there are many different types of single parent families and that each parent has strengths to offer his or her children. It attempts to reassure parents that they can raise healthy, happy children and provides some suggestions which will be helpful.

The booklet was prepared for the Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) by Patricia Ryan, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology and Associate Director of the Institute for the Study of Children and Families at Eastern Michigan University. ACYF and Dr. Ryan are grateful to a number of people who were willing to donate their time to review the manuscript and for their contributions and helpful comments. These include: Judy Apol, Grand Rapids Junior College; Ann Sullivan, M.S.W., University of North Carolina; Norma Warren, Michigan Department of Social Services; Jacquelynn Moffet, Homes for Black Children, Child Placing Agency, Detroit, Michigan; Daphne Busby, Director, Sisterhood of Black Single Mothers, Brooklyn, New York; Hope Marindin, Chairman, Committee for Single Adoptive Parents, Washington, D.C.; and Jeannette Drew, Ph.D., Angelina Laycock, M.A., Emily Jean McFadden, M.S.W., Gordon Moss, Ph.D., Marie Richmond-Abbot, Ph.D., Bruce Warren, Ph.D., all from Eastern Michigan University.

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Single Parent Families

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Photo: Patricia Tod

Introduction

Despite some difficulties, there is no doubt that single parents today can raise children to be happy, healthy adults. Some problems confronting single parents are unique to their situation, while others are problems that all parents face in raising children. Remember, a parent is one of the most important influences in a child's life, but there are many other influences which also shape and guide a child's development.

A single parent often feels overwhelmed by day-to-day tasks and the idea of trying to be two parents in one. Your best course is to forget trying to fill both roles. It is neither possible nor necessary to be two parents in one.

You will be a better parent if you set aside time to meet your own needs. It is very difficult to manage housekeeping tasks, meet the needs of your children, handle financial responsibilities and still find time to enjoy adult activities. But making time for your own recreation and relaxation is of the utmost importance for your health and welfare and the happiness of your family. Either try to delegate some chores to your children or just leave them undone in order to reserve time for yourself.

You and your children *are* a family. Together, you can meet each other's needs and provide an environment for growth. Each family has different values and different ways of doing things. This booklet provides some helpful suggestions, but they are only recommendations.

Like all families in our society, you will look to others for support — schools, churches, relatives and community agencies. Throughout this booklet you will find suggestions about other groups and agencies you may want to call or visit for help. These organizations are found in most communities. If you can't locate one close to you, the list at the back of the booklet provides the address of the national organization. You can write for a list of the chapters closest to you.

You should be familiar with your public social service and welfare agency. In addition to welfare payments and other kinds of financial assistance, these agencies provide family counseling and can help you find other agencies in your community that can help you. Your phone book lists the name of your county agency which can help you locate the nearest local office. The name of the public welfare office varies from state to state and may be called the Department of Public Welfare, of Social Services, of Human Resources, or of Human Services.

You should also know about Parents Without Partners, a private organization especially for single parents that has chapters all over the United States. This organization sponsors group discussions about the problems of single parents, lectures and educational sessions. It also sponsors social activities for adults, children, and the whole family. You can check the listing for Parents Without Partners in your phone book or you can write to the address in the back of this booklet.

Table of Contents

How Did We Become A Single Parent Family? . . . 1
Losing a Parent . . . 1
Disbelief . . . 1
Anger . . . 1
Depression . . . 1
Acceptance . . . 1
Explaining Loss to Your Children . . . 2
When a Child Doesn't Remember the Other Parent . . . 4
Answering Questions About the Missing Parent . . . 4
Children's Feelings About the Missing Parent . . . 4
How Do We Live Together? . . . 7
Child Care . . . 7
Infants and Preschool Children . . . 8
School-Age Children . . . 8
Adolescents . . . 8
Handling Home Chores . . . 9
Managing Your Budget . . . 10
Food and Groceries . . . 10
Energy . . . 11
Child Care Costs . . . 11
Allowances and Recreation . . . 11
Medical and Dental Care . . . 12
Installment Payments and Charge Accounts . . . 12
Housing . . . 12
Increasing Your Income . . . 13
Special Concerns of Single Mothers . . . 13
Working . . . 13
Chores . . . 14
Relationships . . . 14
Special Concerns of Single Fathers . . . 16
Expressing Feelings . . . 16
Home Chores . . . 17
Working . . . 17
Relationships . . . 17
How Do We Get Along With Each Other? . . . 19
Discipline is Teaching . . . 19
Providing Good Discipline . . . 19
Rewarding Good Behavior . . . 20
Teaching the Consequences of Behavior . . . 20

Physical Punishment Teaches the Wrong Thing . . . 20
When to Intervene . . . 21
Realistic Expectations . . . 21
Listening . . . 21
Recognizing What Your Child is Saying . . . 22
Talking About the Other Parent . . . 22
Affection . . . 22
A Special Time for Each Child . . . 23
Touching Shows Love . . . 24
Sleeping Arrangements and Privacy . . . 25
Making Bedtime Easier . . . 25
Providing Privacy . . . 26
Deciding if Your Child Has Serious Problems . . . 26
Games Children Play . . . 27
How Do We Get Along With Others? . . . 29
Your Relatives . . . 29
Your Former Spouse's Relatives . . . 30
Friends . . . 30
Dating and Courtship . . . 30
Courtship Jealousy . . . 30
Overinvolvement With Your Dates . . . 30
Sexual Values . . . 31
Considering Marriage . . . 31
Community Agencies . . . 31
Schools . . . 32
Churches, Synagogues, Clubs and Organizations . . . 32
Helping Organizations . . . 32
Some Special Notes for Particular Types of Single Parents . . . 35
Unmarried Mothers . . . 35
Unmarried Fathers . . . 35
Divorced Parents . . . 36
Widowed Parents . . . 37
Single Adoptive Parents . . . 38
If Your Spouse is Away . . . 38
Community Resources . . . 39
Books You May Find Helpful . . . 41
For Parents . . . 41
For Children . . . 41

Photo: Michael Sullivan

How Did We Become a Single Parent Family?

Sooner or later, all single parents have to answer children's questions as to why they don't have both a mother and a father present in the home. Often, there is an opportunity to prepare children for the separation or loss of a parent. But sometimes, loss is sudden. In some cases, single-parent status happens before the children are old enough to understand explanations. How you will explain your circumstances will depend on the age of your children, the reasons for the family situation, and your own feelings.

Losing a Parent

When children lose a parent from their home, they miss the relationship with the absent parent and they react to the change in their family life. They mourn these losses. They worry about what will happen and they may feel guilty and blame themselves for the parent's absence.

You cannot protect your children from these feelings. You can, however, listen to their feelings, reassure them that the feelings are normal, answer their questions and make sure they do not blame themselves. Also reassure them that they will be loved and cared for.

Children who experience loss will pass through certain stages. Although these stages may be disturbing, it is important to remember they are natural and normal. You should become concerned only if one of your children seems to become stuck at a stage or if behavior is extreme.

Disbelief. Children may refuse to believe that the parent will no longer be there. Depending on age and the extent of the separation, children may cry and cling to a parent, or shut themselves into a bedroom. A very young child may run out to play as if nothing had happened and then return crying a little later to ask if it is true. Older children and teenagers may also go about their routines, but seem preoccupied and remote. Children of all ages may try to be very good or helpful, hoping that they can return the situation to normal.

Anger. As children come to accept the reality of the situation, they will often show anger—possibly by striking out, shouting or crying loudly. At this stage, children often blame one or both parents for the situation. Young children may feel a dead parent has intentionally deserted them. Older children will blame the missing parent for getting sick or the doctor for not curing the parent. Children of any age may blame the remaining parent in a divorce for having driven the other parent out.

Depression. Eventually, the children may appear listless and depressed. They may cry easily and have trouble eating, sleeping, or carrying out normal routines. Young children may not want to go out to play. Older children may stop seeing friends or drop out of their usual activities.

Acceptance. Eventually, most children will accept the loss and changes in their lives and will return to their

former activities. Although they may occasionally revert to one of the previous stages, these episodes should be of shorter duration and occur less and less frequently. Generally speaking, the fewer changes in the child's day-to-day routine, the quicker the child will accept the changed situation.

These stages are suggested only as a guide to indicate the typical reactions of children following loss or separation. While not all children will behave in the same way, you can be sure that your children will react to loss or separation.

Explaining Loss to Your Children

There are certain things you can do to help children who are experiencing loss, even if you cannot prevent their suffering. This will be a difficult time for you because you are also suffering pain or confusion. Your children may fear that you will also leave. It is important to reassure them that although you are unhappy or upset, you will stay and take care of them.

If at all possible, warn a child ahead of time that a death or divorce is likely. How far ahead of time depends on the child's age and the situation. The time between being told and the reality will be painful. However, not discussing such events ahead of time causes children to feel left out and may intensify their fear and confusion.

Generally speaking, the younger the child, the shorter should be the period between being told and the actual event. Very young children find it difficult to anticipate events very far in the future. The more time that elapses, the more likely it is that the child will develop fantasies that the event is not going to occur. Older children and teens need more time to adjust to the situation and to prepare themselves.

Of course, it is not always possible to tell children ahead of time but try to think through carefully what you are going to say to them. It may be helpful to talk first with a close friend or relative. If possible, tell the children yourself. They need to hear your reassurance that you are still there and will still love them. After you have talked about the situation, they may still find it helpful to talk to someone else.

While the amount of detail you give will depend on the situation and the children's ages, you should be absolutely honest. Half-truths and fabrications will only confuse children. Being honest does not mean you should place blame. You may find it helpful to visit your local library and ask help in finding books about death or divorce that have been written for children. It is best to either read these books to your children or to discuss them together.

The basic question all children will have is, "What is going to happen to me?" Your children will want to know both what is expected in the short-run and what kinds of changes will be happening in the long-run. They may need an explanation of death or divorce. Depending on their age, children may ask, "Will I have to go to court?" Or in case of death, "What will I have to do at the funeral?" These questions, along with other questions about what to tell their friends, should be answered truthfully and in enough detail to calm their fears.

If you are in the process of getting a divorce, the children will need to know their other parent still cares about them. No matter how

painful, you must provide the children with the opportunity to see their other parent and assure them of continued contact.

Your children will also want to know if you will continue to live in the same house, if they will still go to the same school, and who will take care of them when you are away. If there are to be changes, the more details you can give about how these changes will affect the children, the easier they will find the changes.

Of course, you may not have all the answers. Reassure your children you will answer as soon as you can. A young child may ask the same question over and over. Older children may understand more easily but will still want plenty of opportunity to discuss their questions with you.

Finally, in your attempt to help your child, do not fall into the trap of saying that things are not so bad, or not to worry, or that it will all go away. Although it might be comforting for you to believe this, your children need to know they have the right to feel hurt and confused. Reassure your children you understand the hurt and that you hurt also. You may want to say, "Things will get better, but you will probably always be sad when you think of this time."

Photo: Michael Sullivan

When a Child Doesn't Remember the Other Parent

Some children blame themselves when a parent leaves. Even if they do not remember the parent, they feel they may have caused the separation. Other children believe if they are good or if they had a chance to talk to their other parent, they could have made everything better. In talking with your children about their other parent, make sure they understand there is nothing that can be done and they are in no way to blame.

If the other parent has died or left the family when the children were very young, they will eventually ask questions about their missing parent. The first questions will probably come somewhere around three when a child begins to realize many other children have two parents. Your child may ask, "Why don't we have a Mommy?" or "Do I have a Daddy?"

As children get older, they will want to know more about the missing parent. They will want to know what the parent looked like, or why he or she left or died or why you never married. If your children are adopted, they will want to know about their biological parents.

Answering Questions About the Missing Parent. In answering questions, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Always be honest. You do not have to tell the whole story or all of the details, but if you concoct a story to make it easier now, it will be difficult later.
- Only answer the questions. If you tell young children more than they ask, it can confuse them.
- Use language children will understand, in line with their age.
- Try to say some good things about the missing parent while remaining honest.

Children's Feelings About the Missing Parent. If children never ask questions, you cannot assume they don't care. Choose a time to say, "Do you ever wonder about your mother (or father)? What are some of the things you would like to know?"

All children feel a part of both of their parents. If they do not know one of their parents, they will wonder about that person and what their relationship would have been like. If you can point out some good things about the missing parent, this will help them feel better. If you feel angry or unhappy toward the missing parent, you may tell your children your feelings, but try to do so in a way which does not condemn the other parent.

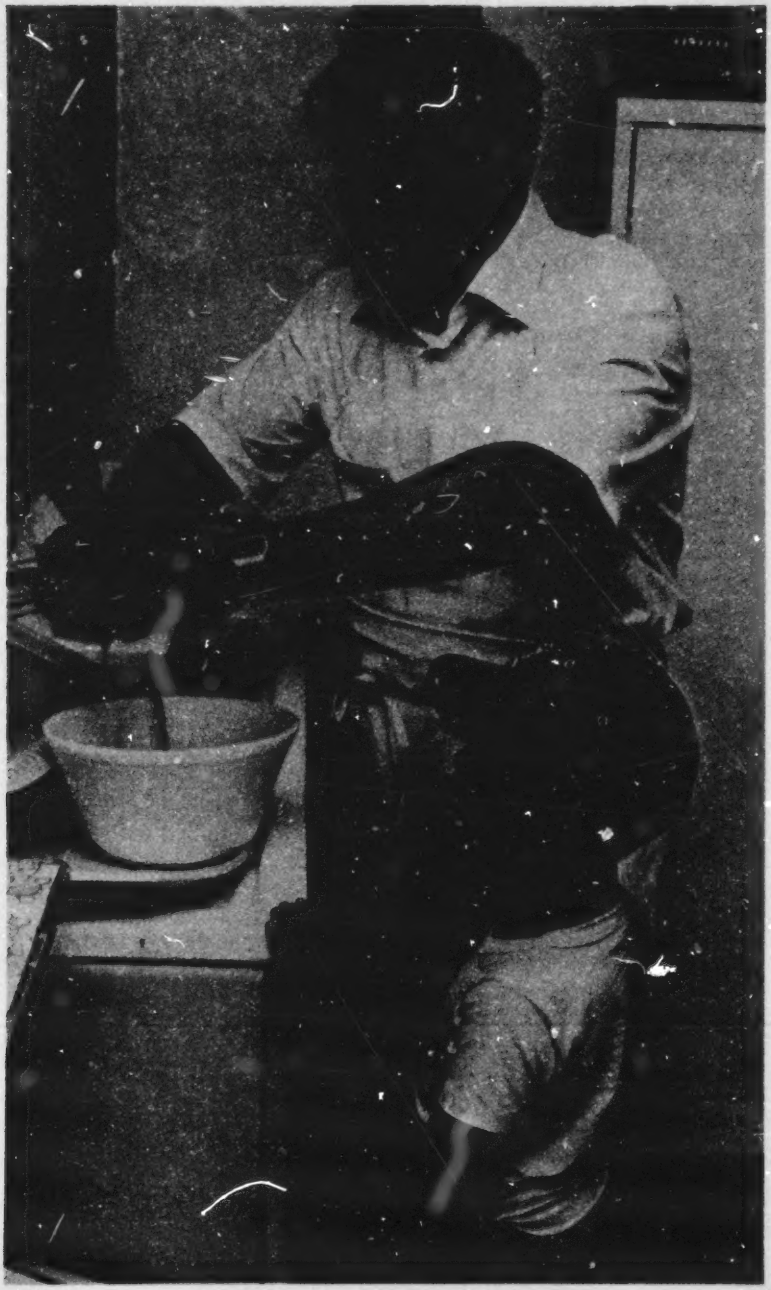
As children get older, they will ask new questions with the need to come to a different kind of understanding. You will want to give more complete information, but the same guidelines apply.

Teenagers have a greater understanding of human relationships and are more aware of the reasons people have difficulty living together. However, it is still important for them to have some good feelings about both of their parents. Teenagers may want to find the absent parent. This may make you unhappy or angry. But keep in mind they are not being disloyal to you in trying to learn more about the other parent.

What if your children's other parent is really not a very nice person? Doesn't honesty compel

Photo: Marvin Koner, Black Star

you to explain? What if there is no good reason why the other parent could not take an interest in your children, visit, send gifts or help in support? Remember you will not help your children by making them hate the other parent. You really cannot speak for another person. You may tell your children you cannot understand the reasons why their other parent acts this way. You may say many people have problems which do not allow them to behave the way we would like. Show you understand why the children would like to see or talk with the other parent and why they may be angry over the lack of attention. Try to help them understand it is normal and natural to be curious and to want to know the other parent.



How Do We Live Together?

One of the pitfalls of single parenting is the attempt to make up for the lack of a second parent by sheltering the children and expecting very little from them. This does not help the children develop a sense of responsibility, while at the same time it puts an unrealistic burden on the parent. Other single parents rely too heavily on their children. This leads the children to take on more than they can handle or to shirk some of the assigned responsibilities making everyone unhappy.

Actually, the amount of contribution children make is probably not as important as making sure home responsibilities are in line with the child's capabilities. These responsibilities should not interfere with school, and must leave time for other activities. If you feel good about the rules you have made, and if they are clearly understood, then your children will probably cooperate. Children who take an appropriate share of home responsibilities usually feel better about themselves and are often more mature and happy than children who are not allowed to contribute.

Child Care

Single parents must make arrangements for child care when they

are at work. Types of arrangements will vary with the age of the child.

Infants and Preschool Children. Many parents would prefer to have someone come into their home to care for small children, but this is usually very expensive. You might want to call a college or university to see if you can hire a college student. If you work evenings or weekends, you may be able to hire a high school student. Sometimes you will be able to hire a neighbor.

In some cases, you will find you must take your children to a sitter or day care center. To help you locate a licensed family day care home or center, contact your local Department of Social Services or Public Welfare Agency. Day care centers and homes will differ in cost and quality. Be sure to visit the center or home before you place your children. Things you should look for and ask about include:

- Are there enough adults to handle the number of children?
- Are infants given special attention?
- Are there books, toys, and outdoor space for play?
- Are there facilities for a variety of activities?
- Is there a place for children to have a quiet time?
- Does the day care worker seem to like children and know how to talk to them?
- Are nutritious snacks or meals served?
- Are the facilities safe for young children?

Even good child care arrangements may break down when the babysitter can't come or a child is ill. If you cannot take time off, you need emergency plans. A neighbor or relative may be willing to fill in. Most communities have professional babysitting services which, though expensive, may be a temporary solution. Explore the availability of homemaker services in your community. The fee is usually based on ability to pay. This service may also be important if you become ill.

School-Age Children. Although part of your child care concerns are handled by sending older children to school, you will still need plans for after school, vacation days, or if you work evenings and weekends. Older children can take care of younger children, but make sure you do not give them more responsibility than they are able to handle. All children should know an adult whom they can call. Many single parents either call home regularly or have their children call them. If this is difficult, make sure there is some adult who will check on the children or who is available in an emergency.

Adolescents. Teenage children are more independent and do not need regular supervision. They do need access to an adult. You will want to have a clear understanding with teens and older school-age children about what they can and cannot do while you are not home and where they can go after school. Must they check in before going out? Can they have friends in the house? How do they leave messages for you? What will be the consequences if they break the rules?

You will find children and teens are usually cooperative if rules can be arranged through a family conference. You can share your concern. They can suggest what they want to do. Together you can arrive at an agreement as to what the rules

will be and an understanding of what will happen if the rules are broken.

Handling Home Chores

In a single-parent home, cooking, laundry, house cleaning, yard work, and errands seem to leave little time for anything else. Still many things get left undone. Children can be helpful. Even very young children can be taught to pick up their toys, hang up their jackets, and clear the table. Most families are no longer concerned about boys' work and girls' work and realize both boys and girls should learn all aspects of managing a house and contributing to family life.

If you find getting all the housework done is a problem, these suggestions may be helpful:

- Make a list of all the chores which must be done each day, each week and each month. Include yard work and caring for pets.
- Eliminate as many things as possible or decide to do some things less often. Many families find they do not have to iron clothes or may choose to iron fewer things. Dusting and vacuuming may be done less frequently.
- Decide who does what, and when. This is a time for a family conference. Some people like to do certain things more than others. If there are jobs nobody likes, or everyone prefers, you can take turns. There are some chores which everyone may be assigned to do for themselves—such as packing lunches, cleaning the bathtub, making their own bed, and putting away their own laundry.
- Decide on when things should be done. Your children should have some say in when they will do things. If they are rushed in the morning,

they may want to make their beds after school. They may prefer doing some things Saturday morning or after dinner. With a little patience, the family can work out an agreeable schedule, even if each one has to make some compromises. A chart or list is useful in helping everyone remember their duties.

- Set rewards and punishments. Some people assign points to different jobs. Each family member must earn a certain number of points before they are free to go about their other activities, or they may get special treats if they earn a given number of points. If chores are not performed by a given time, each

child should know the consequence. Again, allow your children to help set rewards and punishments.

• Make sure each child has time for school work and fun. Help them to arrange their home responsibilities around the other things they want to do. Also make sure your schedule has allowed you sometime to yourself. It is much easier to keep going if you know you will have an hour before bed to read or watch television, or that you will have a few hours once a week just for yourself. It is more important that your children have an unhurried parent than a clean house.

• Whenever possible try to make a game out of housework. The whole family can join in cleaning the yard, painting the house or baking cookies.

Dinnertime may be your most difficult hour after a hard day at work. Keep a supply of frozen and canned goods for quick meals. Try to collect recipes for easy-to-prepare meals.

Managing Your Budget

Wise money management starts with working out a budget. List all monies you can count on and all monies you must spend. Most people are unaware of how much they spend. It may be a good idea to keep a record for one month. At the end of the month you can add up the amount of money spent in each category and start working out your budget.

Compare the total of what you must spend each month with what you can expect in income. If your income is more than your expenses, you should plan to put aside some money for savings. You might keep this money, along with your monthly budgeted amounts for insurance, medical and dental money and other periodic expenses, in a checking or a savings account where it will earn interest. If you are having trouble balancing your checkbook each month, don't hesitate to ask the bank or friends to teach you how to do it.

If in figuring your monthly budget you find your expenses are greater than your income, examine each category and try to figure out how you could spend less or how you can make more money.

Food and Groceries. If you are having trouble meeting food expenses, a call to your local welfare office will let you know if your family is eligible for food stamps. It is advisable to plan your weekly menus in advance. Check to see if

buying larger sizes can save you money. Try buying cheaper brands, house brands, or unlabeled foods which are often of equal quality with name brands.

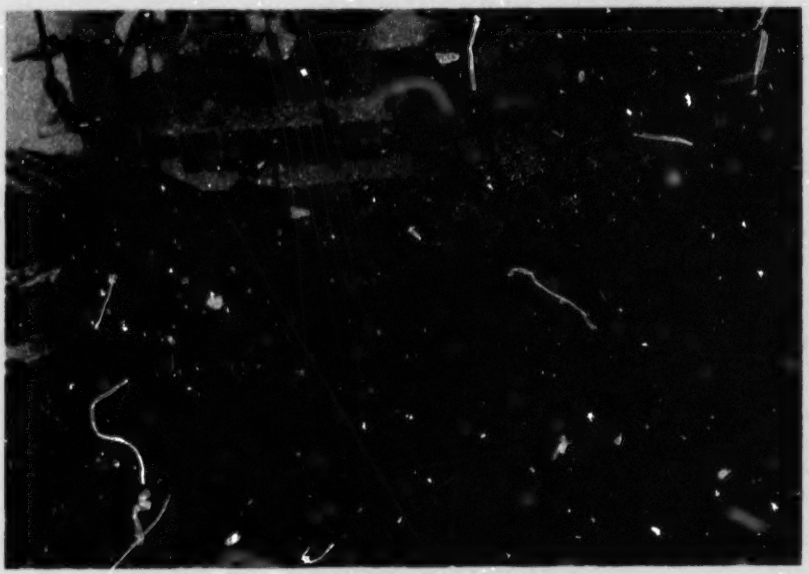
Two areas where most families could cut down are meat and snack foods. Try to plan a few non-meat meals, using eggs, cheese and beans in place of meat or buy cheaper cuts of meat and use them in stews and soups. Many snack foods are expensive and not very nutritious.

Energy. Make it a family project to see how much your family can cut down on energy use. Turn down your thermostat and use less air conditioning. Check lights, televisions, and electric coffee pots to make sure they do not stay on longer than needed. Try to be more efficient in your use of all appliances and to use less hot water. See how often you can walk or bike or use public transportation.

Child Care Costs. See if you can cut down on child care costs by trading babysitting time with a friend or relative. Are there scholarships available for your children at day care centers, camps or other child care programs? You may be able to organize a babysitting pool in your neighborhood. Check with the local Internal Revenue Office to see what types of child care costs are tax deductible.

Allowances and Recreation. It is important for children to learn to handle money. How much money depends on their age and their expenses. Help them plan a budget for themselves. Older children can and should be involved in planning the family budget. When they understand the limits on money and how it must be spent, it is much easier for them to understand why they cannot have everything they want.

Photo: Michael Sullivan



Children can be encouraged to get jobs and earn part of their own money, but you will want to make sure working does not interfere with their school work. School-age children can often find jobs helping neighbors. If your budget allows, you may be able to pay children for extra work they do around the house.

If a child is earning a significant amount of money, you may want to discuss how much of this money should be contributed to the family budget and how much, if any, should go into savings. You can insist that children contribute some of their own money to the household budget, if money is tight. Most young people will cooperate if the agreement is made ahead of time and if at least part of the income they earn can still be used for their own pleasure.

Medical and Dental Care. Many people have insurance which covers all or part of their medical and dental costs. If this is available to you, it is usually worth the cost. In seeking medical help, check to see if there are neighborhood or community clinics where fees are determined by ability to pay. Sometimes university dental schools have clinics where you may receive service at reduced rates. Compare costs.

Check with your public welfare agency for the medical benefits to which you are entitled. See if your children are eligible for Medicaid benefits.

If you or one of your children has a handicap or chronic illness, check your phone book and library to see if there is an association which helps families with this condition. Check with your local welfare department to see if you can receive special services or benefits. Call your local Social Security Office to see if you or your family are eligible for assistance.

Installment Payments and Charge Accounts. If you find you have overextended yourself with credit cards or time payments, limit your use of credit. Many communities have credit counseling agencies to help you plan your budget. You may check on the cost of such a service by calling the agencies listed in the telephone book.

In some cases, it may be wise to take out a loan to pay your obligations, leaving you with one monthly payment which would be less than the total of all the small payments. Compare the cost of interest on such a loan with the interest you are already paying. If you are being swamped by monthly payments, you may approach your creditors and work out a plan by which you will pay them off over a longer period of time.

Housing. Rent or house payments are another major item in most budgets. If you are spending more than you can afford on housing, utilities, heat, and maintenance, you may want to consider finding cheaper housing. This is not an easy solution. If your children have recently experienced loss of or separation from a parent, you may not want to make additional changes. Desirable housing you can afford may be difficult to find. Explore the possibility of public or subsidized housing with your welfare department or the local housing authority.

Consider taking in a roomer or a boarder, sharing an apartment or house with another single parent,

or living with relatives. Although you will have to give up some of your privacy, you may gain adult company and some help with your children and household chores. It's a good idea to make sure you have a clear arrangement ahead of time about expenses, sharing household work, cooking and laundry arrangements, and responsibility for the children. When these things are worked out ahead of time, there are fewer hassles and fewer opportunities for people to feel they are being taken advantage of.

Increasing Your Income. You may be able to increase your income through extra work, finding a better job, improving your skills, applying for additional benefits, or taking advantage of some of the government programs available. Watch newspaper ads, talk to your friends, or visit the state employment security office to explore job opportunities. Consider taking courses through night school, correspondence schools, universities or government programs which might lead to a better paying job. Visit your local Social Security Office and public welfare agency to see if you may be eligible for certain benefits.

If you are receiving child support or alimony payments, or if your children's other parent is not contributing to their support, check with officials of the court, your attorney, or the Legal Aid Society to see if these could be increased or for ways to collect back payments.

Setting up part-time family business and involving your children in the process may help you increase your income and help your children learn about the business world. Do you have a hobby which enables you to make things you could sell? Perhaps you and your family could sew, build bookcases, bake, or do lawn work. Maybe you could develop a skill and receive payment. Check to see if you need a license or inspection to carry on your business.

While there may be ways to increase your income, be sure not to take on more than you can handle. If you are taking a night course or have a second job and find you do not have enough time for yourself or your children, consider postponing or giving up the new activity. Your children would rather do without some things than have an exhausted and irritable parent.

Special Concerns of Single Mothers

Many single mothers have more limited incomes than single fathers. They wonder if they should leave the children in order to work outside of the home. They may have had little previous experience in dealing with home repairs, insurance, cars and other things which traditionally have been viewed as a man's responsibility. They may worry about the lack of an adult male image for their sons or wonder if their daughters will be able to relate to men. If they do not work outside the home, they may have little opportunity to interact with other adults. If they are still young, they may find their parents treat them like children and try to control their lives.

Working. Research has demonstrated that children whose mothers work outside of the home do very well if there is a good child care plan and if the mother feels good about what she is doing. Such children are often more mature and responsible. Your decision to work should be

based on your family's needs, your own needs, and the plans you can make for child care. Many mothers prefer to stay home while their children are very young. If you would like to—and can afford to do so—you might use this time to improve your education and training so you will be able to get a better paying and more interesting job in the future. If you must work, do not feel guilty. Concentrate on making sure you have the best possible child care plan.

Chores. Although facing a new set of chores can be a bit unnerving, keep in mind that women today are finding out that they can do most of the tasks that were previously considered to be men's work. There are many books and pamphlets available to help you get started. Check with your local librarian for helpful books or for a list of inexpensive government publications which you can order. Many schools and other groups offer adult education classes in such fields as home finance, auto repair and home appliance repair which might help you.

Remember to keep all written materials that come with a new appliance or car. Many of these will list simple steps to follow if things go wrong plus a maintenance schedule. With a little practice and care, you may be able to avoid costly service fees.

Relationships. The single mother often worries about her children's lack of adult male companionship. If your children's other parent is able and willing to take an interest in them, you should try to encourage your children to cooperate. Even if a relationship with a missing parent is strained, it is important to your children to get to know and develop a relationship with that parent.

If you are lucky enough to have relatives or friends who enjoy your children, you should encourage this relationship. You may want to make a special effort to join or have your children join groups where they will

have the opportunity for relationships with other adults. Parents Without Partners is a group for single parents which has chapters in many communities and usually sponsors family activities. Churches, YMCA's and YWCA's also have family activities. You may also encourage your children to join the Scouts, Boys or Girls Clubs, 4-H, or similar groups. Your family can also share activities with other families.

If you should note that your children seem to have a hard time relating to either men or women, you will want to make an appointment to talk with a counselor. This may be just a stage or it may be an indication of a serious problem. An appointment with a social worker, mental health worker, or a family counselor may alleviate your worries or help you get appropriate help before the problem becomes more serious.

One concern of single mothers is that they may come to rely too heavily on their sons and allow them to become too attached to them. Children, both boys and girls, will do well if their mothers can take a middle-of-the-road position, showing affection but not letting their children feel they are the only important things in their lives. You can rely on your children to help and as one source of comfort and companionship. However, you are the adult in the family and you must expect to give more to your children than they are capable of giving to you.

Photo: Edo Koenig/Black Star

Special Concerns of Single Fathers

Single fathers have to contend with social attitudes that question their ability to raise children as well as with their own doubts. A father may be concerned about his abiiity to demonstrate his affection for his children. He may be overwhelmed by cooking, laundry and other housekeeping chores for which he has had little experience. It may be difficult for him to balance the responsibilities of his job with the demands of a family. Single fathers may worry that their daughters don't have a woman in whom to confide or wonder if their daughters will grow up to be masculine. They wonder if the absence of a mother will make it difficult for their sons, as adults, to relate to women.

Expressing Feelings. Fortunately, today more and more men are coming to realize the expression of feelings is not unmanly and that parenting is an important job for both men and women. An affectionate and warm father shows his

children, sons and daughters, how important it is for human beings to care and relate to each other. He provides his sons with an ideal toward which they can strive and helps his daughters to relate to other men in a healthy way.

Home Chores. Many men find that with a little thought and planning they can organize and run a home efficiently. There are many books in your library which will help you.

Working. Like other working parents, single or married, you may have to make some hard choices about your work outside the home versus your family obligations. Since many men have been raised to feel their most important contribution to the family is providing them with a good income, it may be difficult to turn down overtime work or a promotion which would mean you would have less time to be with your family. If you should choose to stay home with small children or to work part-time, you may use this time to retrain for a job which would allow you more flexible hours. You alone can judge how much time your children need you and decide the best way to assure that the quality of time spent with them is significant.

Relationships. You may find your children have a fair amount of contact with adult women, since there are many female child care workers and teachers. You will want to encourage the interest of female relatives, neighbors and friends in your children. Preadolescent and early adolescent girls especially may feel embarrassed about discussing their changing bodies with their fathers. Recognize their feelings and encourage them to talk to another woman. Help them feel they can do this without being disloyal to you.

Single fathers may be concerned about asking too much of their children, especially a daughter, in taking over household responsibilities. They may also try to overprotect their daughters if they were unhappy with the way in which their former wives behaved. You can help your daughter develop into a warm, caring, responsible woman by your demonstrated affection. Give her responsibilities in line with her age and ability and by assuring she has time and freedom for her school work, and other activities. Encourage her to develop healthy relationships with boys and girls of her own age. Also, be careful not to allow any resentment you may feel toward your former wife to creep into your relationship with your daughter.

How Do We Get Along With Each Other?

Many parents have questions about what rules they should make, what they should expect of their children and how they should handle misbehavior. Single parents may have more questions, not because their children cause more problems, but because they cannot share the responsibility with another parent.

Discipline Is Teaching

Discipline is more than punishment. It is all the activities and techniques for helping a child grow into a responsible individual. It includes teaching, explaining, rewarding and punishing. Some forms of discipline are more likely to help a child learn. Generally speaking, the forms of discipline that make children feel good about themselves encourage learning. The forms that make children angry or feel inadequate get in the way of learning.

You can teach children to do what you want for fear they will be punished, or you can help children learn to want to do the right thing.

Very young children respond to control from the outside—punishment or reward. Older children see pleasing and displeasing their parents and other important people in their lives as a reward or punishment in and of itself. It isn't until early adolescence that most children are able to say they would be uncomfortable or unhappy if they behaved in a certain way. Until your children develop their own conscience to tell them what is right or wrong, you must set rules and limits for their health, safety, and the comfort of others around them. However, your ultimate goal is to allow them to be able to make their own decisions eventually. If your rules are primarily for control and do not teach, you will not succeed in raising responsible adults.

Providing Good Discipline. Good discipline takes into account what the child is capable of doing, what the child needs, and what will help the child grow. Start by determining what you think is important and what you want most for your children. Do you want them to be obedient or to be able to take responsibility for their behavior? Do you want them to be polite or to be sensitive to the needs of others?

You will not always be fair and consistent, but if such lapses are not too frequent, children learn from you how you handle your mistakes and will be able to tolerate their own mistakes.

Good discipline helps children develop a sense of self-worth. If children feel unworthy, they will feel incapable of doing good. Obviously, if you love and like your children, it is easier for them to feel lovable and likeable. However, feelings cannot be forced or pretended. Many

parents find themselves not liking their children or a particular child. If this is true, you should ask, "Is it the child or the behavior I don't like?" If it is behavior, this can be changed. If it is the child, you should seek help in sorting out your feelings. This does not necessarily mean there is something wrong with you or your child, but your family will experience difficulty until the feelings are resolved.

Rewarding Good Behavior. Although behavior is shaped through both reward and punishment, rewarding good behavior has greater merit. It allows the child to feel capable of earning rewards, whatever they may be—smiles, words of praise, or a special treat. Some parents worry about using rewards because they're afraid the child will demand rewards all of the time. There is no need to worry. While excessive rewards and praise teach children to demand more and more, reasonable rewards and praise help them feel pleasure at their accomplishments. When you teach a new behavior, rewards can be given further and further apart and eventually stopped as the new behavior becomes a pattern.

Teaching the Consequences of Behavior. People do many things because they would be unhappy with the consequences if they didn't do them. Children also need to learn about the natural negative consequences of behavior. Unfortunately, all too often, punishments are negative things parents make up for children. Children learn punishment is not a true consequence of their behavior, but something unpleasant forced on them by adults. Children will learn best if they are allowed to experience the natural consequence of their own behavior. If they sleep late or dawdle in the morning, they will be late for school. If they don't eat their dinner, they will be hungry before bed. If they don't share their toys, their friends won't play with them.

Sometimes, however, the natural consequences of behavior are either too dangerous or have no immediate meaning for the child. For instance, playing in the street means they might get hit by a car. Missing school might even be seen as a reward. You then try to establish some logical consequences. Use rules like, "If you don't put your bike in the garage, you can't ride it tomorrow" or "If you throw the ball in the house, you can't play with it for a week." Letting the bike rust or get stolen would take too long or be too drastic. Waiting for the child to break something with the ball is also too drastic.

Notice that logical consequences are directly connected to the behavior in question. In the above examples, you do not try to punish children by taking away their allowance or sending them to bed early. Since these consequences are not connected with the behavior, they would be artificial. Artificial consequences should be reserved for those few instances where the natural consequences are too remote or dangerous and you cannot think of appropriate logical consequences.

Physical Punishment Teaches the Wrong Thing. Spanking and other forms of physical punishment make children angry, hostile and frightened. Physical punishment teaches children to be abusive, to control through force and to take out anger through hurting others. Using ap-

propriate rewards and punishments give them control. They are able to decide whether a specific behavior or misbehavior is worth the consequence. Giving children control over their own behavior may be uncomfortable to you, but it prepares children gradually for the types of decisions they will have to make as adults.

When to Intervene. As you focus on teaching, you will have to determine when you should intervene. Many parents find the following signals helpful:

- *Red Light Behavior:* that which is harmful to the child or others or is destructive or illegal. You must intervene ***immediately.*** If the child's behavior can't be controlled, outside help should be sought.

- *Yellow Light Behavior:* that which may have harmful or bothersome consequences and around which you may want to counsel the child, set limits or apply logical consequences.

- *Green Light Behavior:* those behaviors which should be allowed to remain under the control of the child and for which the natural consequences will be all the child needs. You can occasionally point out the consequences, but constant reminding is at best nagging and may set up a power struggle between you and the child.

In determining whether your child's behavior is a red, yellow, or green light, you will have to consider the age of the child and your own values.

Realistic Expectations. When attempting to limit or encourage certain behaviors, you must also determine what the child can control. Thus, expecting toddlers to control their bladder during the day or remain dry at night may be unrealistic, and attempting to use consequences—either rewards or punishments—will only frustrate young children and make them feel angry or even unworthy. Establishing a time for children to be in bed is realistic. Saying they must be asleep by a certain time is not realistic because it is beyond their control.

One area where no one can be expected to have control is the area of feelings. You cannot insist that someone not be angry or not be sad or must love someone else. You can and should teach your children how to express their feelings appropriately. This is sometimes difficult because you may not want your children to be angry or sad. Recognizing that all people feel this way sometime may help you focus on teaching your child appropriate ways to express these feelings. If a child is angry or unhappy most of the time, you will want to investigate further as to the cause.

Listening

Very often parents find it difficult to hear or understand what their children are really saying. Sometimes children find it difficult to express what they are really feeling. At other times, parents are too busy to take the time to find out what the child wants. Often parents feel they should be teaching children rather than listening to what they say.

Sometimes a child simply makes a statement of fact, "It is raining outside." At other times, the child's statement shows a feeling, "I hate Johnny" or "I wish I could have

a baseball, too." Sometimes it is a demand for attention, "I can swing higher than you." As a parent, you should listen carefully and try to determine what your child is trying to communicate.

Recognizing What Your Child is Saying. Parents often feel they should intervene when all the child needs is for the parent to recognize feelings. This is especially true when a child expresses anger. You may find yourself telling a child, "You shouldn't have done that and you wouldn't have gotten angry" or "You shouldn't feel angry with your sister." Such statements do not help a child and often make the child more angry or guilty. If you are allowing your children to experience the natural consequences of their behavior, you will not feel you have to intervene.

Listening to children's feelings will help you decide when they need your help, when they need your understanding, and when you should intervene to prevent harmful or destructive behavior. When a child threatens to harm someone, you should say something like, "It makes you very angry when your sister teases you. It is O.K. to feel angry, but you cannot hit her. I will not let you hit her. If you must hit something, hit your pillow instead." This tells the child you recognize the anger and see it as legitimate, but that you will not allow that anger to cause harm to anyone else. It also suggests a way to work out the anger in a nondestructive way.

The extent to which you intervene depends on the age of your child. A young child will need a lot of help in dealing with feelings and in controlling behavior. As children grow, you can give them more freedom in experiencing consequences. With adolescent children, you will find you have little control over their behavior. Teens need some structure and feel more comfortable and more loved if their parents insist on enforcing some rules. However, you will find it more comfortable living with teens if you can make as few rules as possible and point out to them the natural consequences of their behavior. Use the red, yellow, green light system to help you determine when you should set rules and when you should point out consequences.

Talking About the Other Parent. One area you may find disturbing is when your children talk about the other parent. You may be tempted to tell your children how they ought to feel or how you wish they would feel. If you do, you will make it difficult for them to ask questions and share their feelings with you. Try to show children you understand and find their feelings natural and normal. Answer each question as honestly as possible. You do not need to give all the details and should try not to say negative things about the other parent. If you find you are upset, you can say, "It makes me unhappy to talk about this, but I will try to answer your questions."

Affection

Every child needs attention and affection. Although you love your children and try to show them how much you care, you may find your schedule is so hectic you do not have as much time as you would like. You may sometimes feel you are so busy with chores, disciplining your children and trying to keep on top of things that most of your time with your children is spent telling them

Photo: Michael Sullivan

what to do or stopping fights. If your children have recently been separated from a parent, they may need extra attention to let them know you care, just at the time you feel you have less time and more worries.

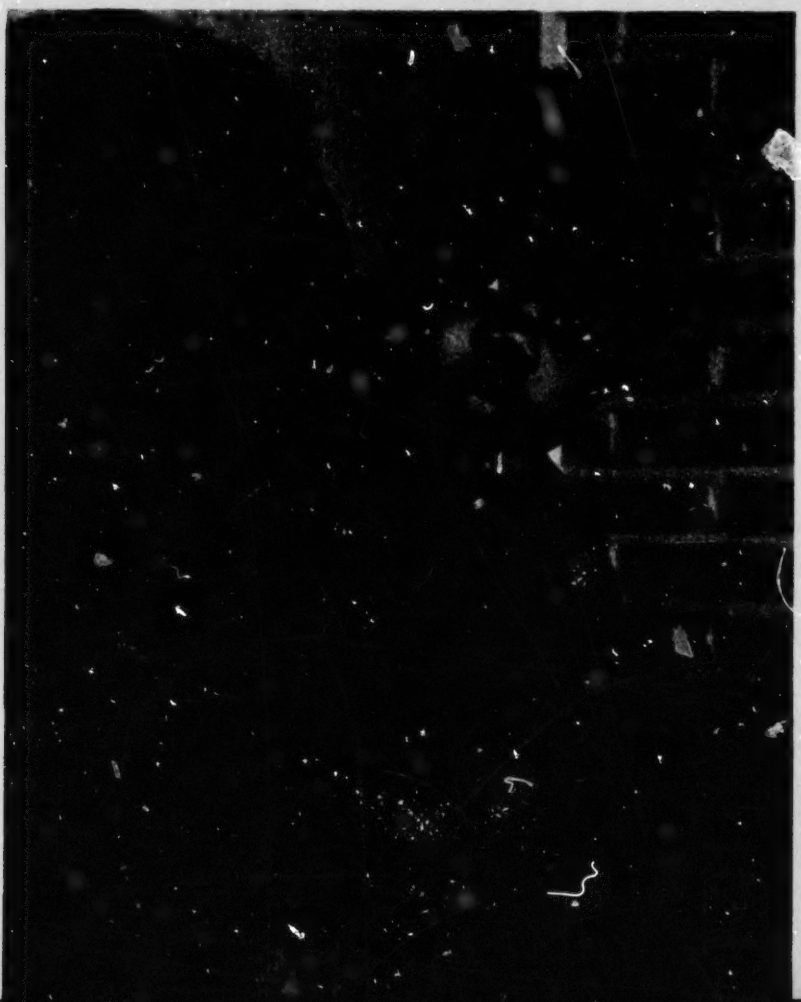
A Special Time for Each Child. There are two things you can almost always fit into your schedule that should help. One is to set aside some time each day for each child, and the other is to try to touch each child once a day. Even small children will quickly learn to wait if they get a special time every day. Think through your schedule. Decide at what times you are most hurried and what times you may be able to relax for a few minutes. The time you spend with each child may be only a few minutes, but if possible, it should occur around the same time of day. It could be a few minutes after breakfast, after school, when you get home from work, after dinner or before bed.

This time does not have to be a time when the two of you just sit and talk. It can be story time, game time, homework time, or doing chores together. But it should be a time when your children know they will have your complete attention and you will listen carefully, even if you can't always do so at other times. If children know they will have this time, you can tell children who try to interrupt that you will be with them at their time. Generally speaking, the younger the child, the more frequent the times should be, although they can be of shorter duration. Older children and teen-

agers may not always need to actually spend the time in your company. Just knowing you are available during a set time may be enough.

Touching Shows Love. Expressing affection through touching a child is very effective. Most of us have no problems in cuddling and holding babies and small children. Some people find it uncomfortable to touch older children, especially boys. You may find by the time your children are in school for a year or two they will act embarrassed if you hug or kiss them in front of friends. You will want to respect their feelings but most likely find they like a hug or a kiss when no one else is around. The way you touch your children should feel comfortable to you. If you are not a person who hugs and kisses very often, try a pat on the arm or back.

Although touching your child is a concrete way of expressing your affection and will make both of you feel good, keep it within comfortable limits. Single parents often worry that their children may become too attached to them. It is normal for



small children to love their parents and even say they will marry them some day. However, most children learn by the time they are five or six that they will have to find someone their own age to marry. A single parent may sometimes invest so much attention and affection in a child that the child never gives up the fantasy of marrying the parent.

Sometimes children feel a parent needs them and sacrifice friendships and activities in order to meet the parent's needs. Such children may develop emotional problems and may either have difficulty with adult relationships or be very unhappy if the parent decides to marry.

Although this is most likely to happen between a single father and his daughter or a single mother and her son, it can happen when the parent and child are of the same sex. If you have a child who does not seem to have many friends, or who is not involved in separate activities, you will want to examine your relationship. Use your own feelings as a guide. If you feel your relationship is too close, or if you are uncomfortable about some of the things you are doing with your child, you may want to check your concerns with a professional person.

The way you touch your child should make both of you feel good. It should not overstimulate the child. Too much cuddling or physical contact may lead a child to become over excited or to develop fantasies about your relationship. Prolonged petting and caressing or a lot of rough-housing, including prolonged tickling, may be upsetting.

Sleeping Arrangements and Privacy

Many parents are concerned about children who want to sleep with them. It is not unusual for young children to ask for a parent to stay in their bedroom for awhile. If you are tired, you may well fall asleep while waiting for your child to fall asleep and wind up spending the night. Other times children will come into your bed at night. It is often hard to insist they return to their own bed. Although customs differ and you may be limited in bedroom space, children should not sleep in the same bed as a parent. If you must sleep in the same room with your child, have separate beds.

Making Bedtime Easier. If you have a problem with getting your children to go to bed at night, set up a little schedule which will allow them something to look forward to and which will make bedtime more comfortable. It may be difficult for some children to go to a dark room alone. Plan some good things for bedtime. A glass of milk, a story, and a good night kiss will make bedtime more pleasant. If this is an especially difficult time for a child, leave a light on or a radio playing soft music. You may sit in the next room so the child knows you are close by. If a child feels comfortable going to bed, there will be less fuss. Eventually, you can move farther away and your child will still feel secure.

Do not feel you are giving in to your children by helping them feel comfortable about going to sleep. Rather, think about how you can help them learn you are concerned and will be close by. It may help if you set aside an additional half hour for bedtime. If you think of the children's bedtime as 8:00 p.m., you will probably look forward to having some free time at 8:00. Think instead of your free time beginning at

8:30. This will help you be more patient as you help your children learn it is safe and comfortable to go to sleep.

Even if you are very crowded, try to arrange for children to have their own bed or sleep with a sibling of the same sex by the time they are seven. Boys and girls should not sleep in the same room after they reach adolescence.

Providing Privacy. Many people today feel we should not try to hide our bodies and that it is good for boys and girls not to feel their own body is shameful. You should still teach your children their bodies are private and they do not have to show or let other people touch their bodies.

Most experts agree that habitually seeing a parent undress can be disturbing and stimulating to children over age three. You should arrange for privacy in dressing and bathing. This becomes critical as a child reaches adolescence. Never make fun of a child who wants more privacy. If the concern seems excessive, you may say, "You feel uncomfortable now and I will respect your feelings. You will probably learn not to be so uncomfortable in the future."

Privacy also includes a place for children to keep things they do not want other people to touch. Each child should have a place, a drawer, a box or a closet where they can keep things. No one in the family, including you, should go into the safe place without the child's permission. This tells your children how much you trust them and, incidentally, makes it much easier for you to set aside an area for yourself where your children are not allowed to interfere.

Deciding If Your Child Has Serious Problems

Most children go through stages that worry their parents. Sooner or later you will wonder if one or more of your children needs special help. It is always wise to discuss your worries with someone else. You may have a relative, friend or neighbor with whom you can discuss your concerns. It is reassuring to find other children behave in the same way. Your minister, priest or rabbi may also be helpful. If you cannot get reassurance from your clergyman, try to get professional help. Most communities have a social service agency or mental health clinic where trained personnel can listen to your concerns and suggest places where you can get more help if it is indicated. Public agencies usually charge no fee or a fee based on your income.

When trying to decide if your child needs special help, remember the red light, yellow light, green light system. If a child seems to be in danger of getting hurt or hurting other people, of destroying property or of doing something illegal, you should seek help immediately. This does not mean the child is necessarily emotionally ill, and it certainly does not mean you have been a bad parent. But it does mean you need help.

Sometimes a child's behavior is worrisome without going to these extremes. The child who is very, very "good" or who is "withdrawn" may also need help. Sometimes a conference with the child's teacher or other adults who work with the child will help you determine how realistic your concerns are.

Sometimes a child can make a parent very angry. If you find

yourself constantly angry at your children or at a particular child, this is also a time to seek help. Outside help is especially necessary if you find yourself hurting a child or feel you would like to hurt one of them. If your children seem to have a lot of trouble with another adult who sometimes takes care of them—a babysitter, a relative, someone you are dating or someone with whom you are living—try to find out what the problem is. You should be especially concerned if a child seems to be afraid to stay with this person, if this person often uses physical punishment with the children, or if the children often get hurt when alone with this person.

If you seek professional counseling, the therapist will probably want to work with you as well as with the child. Do not feel the therapist is blaming you for the child's problems. It will be easier to help the child if you cooperate. You may also receive suggestions which will make your life easier with the child. Don't, however, expect the therapist to share with you everything the child says. A therapist will only be able to establish a good relationship with the child if the child feels trust and confidence. If your child is in therapy, do not expect things to change rapidly. It took a long time for the things bothering your child to build up, and it will take time to sort them out. It is not unusual for a child in therapy to seem to get worse before getting better. If things are not going the way you expected and your child's therapist cannot reassure you, get a second opinion.

Games Children Play

Some children are quick to pick up on their parent's concerns. If your children find a certain topic makes you upset, you can expect they may make a game out of bringing up these topics. They are really telling you they want more of your attention. If you suspect this is happening, ask yourself: When does this usually happen? What tends to upset me? How do the children react? Try to show your children a lot of attention when they are not playing the game.

Photo: Kosti Ruohomaa, Black Star

How Do We Get Along With Others?

Although family ties are very important, no family exists in isolation. Each family has ties with relatives, friends, neighbors, schools, churches and other groups in the community. By encouraging these ties, your family as a whole, and each individual in your family can be happier. If you have problems or need help, these people are available to you. Use them.

Your Relatives

Almost everyone has some family ties. Many single parents rely heavily on their parents, brothers and sisters. They may live with relatives, share expenses with them, seek their help in child care or simply see them as a source of encouragement and support when things get rough. Some single parents find these relationships difficult. Even if they appreciate the help of their relatives, they may find at times they interfere.

Your relationship with your relatives will depend in part on how much you need them. If you are very young, you may find your parents continue to treat you as a child, even though you are a parent yourself.

If your family is very involved in raising your children, you may worry your children will become more attached to a particular relative than they are to you. You may worry that your relatives spoil your children, play favorites, or treat them more strictly than you would like.

Only you can weigh the advantages and disadvantages your relatives offer your family. If you are very young, you may have little choice at the present time, but you will be able to make a change when you get older. In the meantime, you can prepare for such a change by improving your job skills or exploring the types of help you need to be more independent. If you feel your relatives are too interfering, you might try listing all the advantages and disadvantages of your relationship with them. This may help you determine where you can make some changes. Two things to keep in mind are:

1. Your relatives cannot harm your relationship with your children if you are a loving concerned parent and demonstrate your concern by spending time with your children.

2. Most relationships are smoother if you have a clear understanding of what each person expects of the other.

Although your parents may always treat you like a child, they will be less likely to do so as you demonstrate your ability to act as an independent adult. If you allow your parents to take care of you, they will

expect to be able to tell you what to do. As you demonstrate your capacity to take care of yourself and your children, you will be able to get along better.

Your Former Spouse's Relatives

Your children have another set of relatives through their other parent. They can be an important source of support. Many times they will want to spend time with your children. Try to encourage this relationship.

Friends

Another source of support for your family is your friends. These may be neighbors, people with whom you work or with whom you grew up. Sometimes single parents find they are so busy it is difficult to find time to spend with their friends. Don't let this happen to you. Your friends can supply you with the adult company you need. You can often include your children in family activities with the families of your friends.

Most people find their friendships change over time. Some people remain friends for a long time. Others become less interesting or grow apart. If people you used to be friendly with no longer seem to have the same interests as you do, seek new friends.

Do not rely on your friends to always call or invite you somewhere. Recognize they may feel embarrassed about your situation as a single parent. This doesn't mean that they blame you or don't want to remain friends. They may not know what to say or what you expect of them. Take the initiative. Reach out and invite your friends to go somewhere with you or to come to your house.

Sometimes a small group of people find it useful to meet regularly to discuss a common problem such as divorce, parenting, or widowhood. See if there is such a group at your church or school, or see if you can start such a group by inviting some people to your house.

Dating and Courtship

Most single parents want and need adult companionship, including dating. Such relationships make it less likely you will become overinvolved with your children. How active you are sexually will depend upon your own value system. Most communities are much more open about sexual behavior than they were even a short time ago. No one can tell you what to do, and you will have to decide what is comfortable for you. There are several areas you will want to think about. By considering your children's feelings and anticipating their reactions, you will be able to work out a way to spend time dating which is comfortable for everyone.

Courtship Jealousy. Many children will be jealous or anxious about any time you spend away from them. They may be especially concerned with your dating behavior if they feel you are likely to remarry. This will depend upon the child's age, relationship with you and relationship with the other parent. Jealousy may stem from concern over being replaced in your affections. As they realize your adult relationships do not mean you love them less, they will become less concerned.

Overinvolvement With Your Dates. Many of the people you date may

enjoy your children and spend time with them. If your schedule is limited you may find it much easier to combine dates and outings with your children. This may be one of the ways you choose to help your children relate to adults of the opposite sex. But children may find it hard to separate from these adults if the relationship should break off. Children who have been separated from a parent may overreact to the breaking off of a new relationship. Because of this, many single parents choose to keep their dating activities separate from their children until such a time as they expect to marry.

Sexual Values. If you should choose to allow someone to stay overnight or decide to live with someone or in other ways allow your children to know you are sexually active, you will have to decide how to answer their questions. Very young children may accept the arrangement without any question but act surprised if you bar them from your bedroom at a time they are used to entering. They may ask a person at breakfast, "Did you stay here last night? Where did you sleep?"

Older children may be embarrassed, especially if their friends' parents frown on such behavior. Adolescent children may ask if you would permit them to behave in the same way. There are no easy answers to these questions. Sexual values have been changing very rapidly in our society. Try to think through ahead of time what you will share with your children and how you will answer their questions. There is nothing wrong with maintaining your sexual life as part of your adult privacy which does not have to be discussed with your children.

If your sexual values are very different from those of most of the community, this may be used against you in a custody battle. You may want to be discrete so as not to jeopardize your family.

Considering Marriage. If you should decide to marry, think about the marriage as it will affect your whole family. If the person you wish to marry has children, your marriage will result in the blending of two families.

When two people decide to marry, they often think only of each other, forgetting their children will have a big influence on their marriage. Give your children and your future spouse time to get to know each other before the wedding. This does not mean your children should have a major voice in determining who and when you should marry. This is too much responsibility for any child.

Do not expect your children to react to your new spouse as a parent. If they are very young, they may soon come to think of him or her as such, but you cannot rush this process. Older children may never reach this point. Think of your new spouse as a special adult friend to your children—someone who has a special concern for them.

Community Agencies

Most families are involved with a number of community organizations and agencies. You and your child have the same right of access to these organizations as any other family in the community. You may occasionally find some people make remarks which suggest there is something wrong with you or your family. You may hear remarks about "broken families" or the problems

children of single parents have in adjusting. Although you cannot re-educate the community all by yourself, there is no reason to let such remarks pass. You may tell people you feel your family is "whole." You may point out that you and your children have a right to be treated as individuals and you will not let others lump you into a group or category.

Schools. Children spend a good part of their early lives in school. If the school provides a pleasant, satisfying environment for the child, this will go a long way toward making the child feel confident and worthwhile. If school is an unpleasant place, this will cause many problems for the child. Try to get to know as much as possible about your child's school. If your work schedule does not allow you to visit during the day, attend PTA meetings in the evenings. When you can't attend a school function, let your children know you are disappointed. See if a friend or relative can attend in your place.

Be sure you have copies of school rules and discipline policies. Arrange to meet your child's teacher and principal at the PTA meeting or other times when the school is open when you can be there. Let the teacher know you are interested in your child's progress. If your child is having difficulties, check to see what you can do to help.

Federal and State laws require that school systems must provide every child with an education. If your child is handicapped, the school must provide an educational plan until the child is 25. If you feel your child is not receiving educational services, contact Closer Look, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Churches, Synagogues, Clubs and Organizations. Most communities have a number of organizations which sponsor activities for families, children and adults. Participation in such activities can be a source of support and help for your family as well as a place for healthy recreation. They can provide you with adult company and often provide your children with the opportunity to relate to other adult men and women. Two organizations in which you might be especially interested are Parents Without Partners and Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America. Do not overlook your church, synagogue and YWCA or YMCA community centers. These organizations also have activities for adults, children and families.

Some single parents find particular organizations or groups have a way of making them feel uncomfortable. There is still a certain amount of prejudice against single parents, especially those who are divorced or who have never married. If you feel members of your organization or congregation are making you feel uncomfortable, check with the leader, minister, priest or rabbi; perhaps you are being overly sensitive. If your discomfort persists, look for another group or congregation with which you feel more comfortable.

Helping Organizations. If you are having difficulties—financial, housing, emotional, health or child-rearing problems—check in the community for resources to help you. You will want to check with your county public welfare agency. You will be able to find the address in a phone book by looking under the name of the county in which you live. If you live in a large city, you

Photo: Leo Choplin, Black Star

may find a branch office relatively close to you. If you live in a rural area or small town, you may have to make arrangements to go to the county seat. The staff there can either help you directly or refer you to an appropriate agency or service. They may be able to provide financial assistance or help you with other types of problems.

If you have to wait some time for an appointment with a particular agency, do not get discouraged. Check from time to time to see where you are on the waiting list and when they expect to call you.

Unfortunately, helping agencies do not always provide the help we expect. There are a few questions you might ask: "Do they understand what my problem is and what kind of help I would like?" "Is this the right agency to help me?" "Is there another agency which might better serve my need?" These are not easy questions to answer but will help you decide whether or not you should be getting better service.

If you feel you are not getting the services to which you and your family are entitled, seek help in getting your rights. Do not be afraid to contact your elected officials. Most of them have staffs to help. If the agency you are unhappy with is a State agency, call or write your state legislator. If it is a city agency, call your city council. Other agencies which may be of help are listed in the back of this booklet.

Photo: Michael Sullivan

Some Special Notes for Particular Types of Single Parents

This section will deal with some more specific concerns of the young unmarried mother, the young unmarried father, the divorced parent, the widowed parent, the adoptive parent, and the parent whose spouse is away for a long period.

Unmarried Mothers

Most communities offer unmarried mothers a variety of services. Take advantage of these services to plan the next few years of your life. Your first concern will be financial support for you and the baby and a place for you to live. Discussion with a trained person will help you see the options you have. You will want to explore remaining in your parents' home, a relative's home, a foster home where you and your child can remain together, financial assistance from your baby's father, welfare assistance, job opportunities, child care, and educational opportunities.

If your family is supportive and you choose to live with them, you may still want to discuss your long-range plans with an objective outsider. Many young mothers complain that their mothers will not let them be a parent to their own child. If you feel this way, it may be because you are unsure of your ability with the baby. There are many classes for new parents. Such a class may give you confidence you need to take a more active role with your child.

Unmarried Fathers

Most communities have come to recognize the rights of the unmarried father. You will want to check with an attorney to see what your

legal obligations are and what rights you have in making decisions for your child. Generally speaking, you do have certain rights, but these may be terminated if you do not contribute support for the baby or in other ways demonstrate your interest and concern. You have a right to present your point of view in court.

You may find your parents and friends do not expect you to be concerned and they may try to protect you. A counselor can help you sort out your feelings and make plans. You will want to decide the extent to which you want to be involved in making decisions about your child. Will you agree to adoption? Will you provide support if the mother keeps the baby? How often do you want to see your child?

Your right to make these decisions will be based in part on your willingness and ability to remain involved.

Divorced Parents

In the past, most divorces resulted in one parent, usually the mother, taking custody of the children and the other parent having visiting rights. The father usually paid child support or alimony. Today, courts are more flexible in making such arrangements. Some fathers are being given custody and some mothers are being asked to make support payments.

No matter what the basis for disagreement between you and your former spouse, try to plan an arrangement which will work towards the best interests of your children. Almost always, the child's best interests require as much time as possible with both parents. For this reason, many courts are now considering joint custody arrangements. In setting up custody, support and visitation, remember failure to be a good spouse does not mean a person can't be a good parent. Even if your former spouse has shortcomings as a parent, your children need to spend time with both of you.

In making whatever arrangements, have the answers to the following questions clearly understood. When does each parent have charge of the children? Who makes what decisions? Who pays for what? How do you alter arrangements? What do you do if there is a disagreement?

When your children go to visit their other parent, you may find you are jealous of the attention and affection they show. You may worry that the other parent is able to give them more or is not as strict. This is especially true if your children spend most of their time with you, and you are the one who has to enforce most of the rules.

Try to remember you are the one who will determine how you and your children get along. If you are fair and concerned about your children, they will recognize and appreciate this. If they attempt to tell you how much the other parent gives them or how they do not have to obey any rules at the other parent's home, point out that you and your former spouse each has different ideas and values. This should stop their attempts to play one parent against another. Remember, everyone treats your children differently. They have different rules at school and at their grandparents' house. They will not become confused as long as they know what to expect at each place.

Jealousy and resentment over your children's relationship to someone your former spouse is dating or living with is also a common prob-

lem. Try to remember that the person your former spouse is seeing will in no way take your place in your children's affections. In their eyes, you are their only mother or father. Also, avoid putting your children in an awkward position by asking them questions about your former spouse's new companion.

Widowed Parents

Talking to children about death is difficult because few adults themselves have come to terms with death. You will want to discuss your own feelings and beliefs about death with your children in language they can understand. Very young children often become confused if they are told someone who died "went away," "went to sleep," or "went to heaven." They have difficulty in thinking about death being forever and worry what will happen to them if they should die or you should die.

You will want to explain what happened—illness or an accident, what will happen to the body, and that it is forever. Explain biological death before you discuss your religious beliefs. Tell your children what you believe from a religious point of view in such a way that it does not confuse your children about what is happening. Reassure them that although everyone dies eventually, it is unlikely you or they will die for a long, long time.

Whatever the age of your children, make sure they are allowed to express their feelings of grief. If you expect overly emotional scenes at the funeral, you may want to protect your children, but be sure they are involved in some way. Also, be careful they do not blame themselves or

Photo: John Rees/Black Star

take responsibility for the death. If you give them plenty of opportunity to talk to you and to express their feelings, you will be able to correct any wrong impressions or misinformation they have. If a child's grief is prolonged, discuss his or her reactions with a counselor.

Single Adoptive Parents

Most single adoptive parents have the opportunity to discuss parenthood with a social worker before the adoption. During this time you probably discussed your child's biological family and the reasons your child was available for adoption. At some time adopted children will want to learn more. If you have adopted children old enough to remember the past, they may be especially concerned about their biological families and the apparent rejection of the biological family. Although there are no easy answers, the more you know about your children's background, the more easily you can honestly answer these questions. If possible, point out indications of concern on the part of the biological family and any plans they made for assuring your child's well being.

Remember the adoption agency with which you worked remains a resource for you no matter how long ago the adoption took place. If you have problems, call the agency and make an appointment to talk to someone. If that person is not helpful, ask for a referral.

If Your Spouse is Away

If your spouse has to be away from home for a long time because of a job, military, illness, or is in prison, you will find that although you are technically married, you are in many ways like a single parent. Do your best to explain to your children why the absent parent must be away in terms they can understand. Reassure them of the absent parent's concern. If possible, help them keep track of the time when the absent parent will return. Do encourage any visits, exchange of letters, gifts, telephone calls, and pictures which will demonstrate the other parent's concern and affection and help maintain the relationship.

Be realistic about any promises you make. If your children are away from a parent for a long time, there will be some strain when the family is reunited. If you have promised your children that everything will be great when their other parent returns, they may overreact to any problems that arise. Reassure your children of their missing parent's concern for them, but do not suggest everything will be all right forever when that parent returns.

Community Resources

The following agencies are found in most communities. The address of the national organization is given below. If you cannot find the agency in your local phone book, you can write for the chapter or location nearest you.

American Association of Credit Counselors, 1111 South Woodward, Royal Oak, Michigan 48067. Affiliate agencies provide help in budgeting and credit planning. Some free services or at reduced fees.

American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors, 225 Yale Avenue, Claremont, California 91711. Help in locating family counselors and services.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, 117 South 17th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103. Can provide trained volunteers to work with boys and girls.

Boys Clubs of America, 771 First Avenue, New York, New York 10017. Can provide activities for children.

Boy Scouts of America, North Brunswick, New Jersey 08902. Can provide activities for children.

Closer Look, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Help for handicapped children and their families.

Family Planning and Information Services, 300 Park Avenue, South, New York, New York 10010. Will provide information on birth control, abortion and fertility problems.

Family Service Association of America, 44 East 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010. Help in locating appropriate services for counseling and therapy.

Girls Clubs of America, 205 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10016. Can provide activities for children.

Girl Scouts of the USA, 830 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022. Can provide activities for children.

North American Council on Adoptable Children, 250 East Blaine, Riverside, California 92507. Can help adoptive or potential adoptive parents.

Parents Anonymous, 2810 Artesid Boulevard, Redondo Beach, California 90278. Provide help to parents who are afraid they

are abusing or might abuse their children.

Parents Without Partners, 7910 Woodmont Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20014. Provides educational and support meetings and family activities.

The following organizations may not be found in many communities. Writing to them may provide you with some resources.

Committee for Single Adoptive Parents, P.O. Box 4074, Washington, D.C. 20015.

Fathers United for Equal Justice, Inc., 2 Brewer Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138.

The Sisterhood of Black Single Mothers, Inc., 1360 Fulton Street (Room 423), Brooklyn, New York 11216.

The following agencies are part of your local, State or Federal Government. Look in the phone book under the name of your county, city or State.

General assistance in obtaining resources and financial assistance:
- Department of Public Welfare
- Department of Social Services
- Department of Human Resources

Help with housing:
- Public Housing Authority
- Housing & Urban Development

For health and counseling:
- Community Mental Health
- CRISIS Center
- Health Department

For legal help:
- Friend of the Court

Other organizations probably listed in your phone book which may be helpful:
- American Civil Liberties Union
- American Red Cross
- Children's Aid Society
- Legal Aid
- Salvation Army
- United Way
- Various agencies affiliated with religious groups. Look under the name of the religious organization.

Books You May Find Helpful

For Parents:

Aiken, Edith and Estelle Ruben. *Part-Time Father.* New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1976.

Biller, Henry and Dennis Meredith. *Father Power.* New York: David McKay, 1974.

Comer, James and Alvin Poussaint. *Black Child Care—How to Bring Up A Healthy Black Child in America.* New York: Pocket Books, 1976.

Demeter, Anna. *Legal Kidnapping.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1976.

Diagram Group. *Your Child's Body.* New York: Paddington Press, 1977.

Dodson, Fitzhugh. *How to Father.* Los Angeles: Nash, 1974.

Gardner, Richard. *The Parents Book About Divorce.* New York: Bantam, 1977.

Ginott, Haim. *Between Parent and Child.* New York: Macmillan, 1965.

Ginott, Haim. *Between Parent and Teenager.* New York: Macmillan, 1969.

Klein, Ted. *The Father's Book.* New York: William Morrow, 1968.

Krantzler, Mel. *Creative Divorce.* New York: Signet Books, 1973.

Kubler-Ross, E. *Questions and Answers on Death and Dying.* New York: Macmillan, 1974.

Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth. *Death: The Final Stage of Growth* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1975.

LeVine, James. *Who Will Raise the Children.* Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1976.

Metz, Charles. *Divorce and Custody for Men.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1968.

Nobel, June and William. *The Custody Trap.* New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1975.

Parents Without Partners, Inc. *The Single Parent.* Bi-monthly Journal, New York.

Patterson, Gerald. *Families.* Champaign, Illinois: Research Press, 1975.

Reed, Elizabeth L. *Helping Children With the Mystery of Death.* Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1970.

Spock, Benjamin, *Baby and Child Care.* New York: Pocket Books, 1974.

Spock, Benjamin. *Raising Children in a Difficult Time.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1974.

Wheeler, Michael. *No Fault Divorce.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1974.

For Children:

Gardner, Richard, *The Boys and Girls Book About Divorce.* New York: Bantam, 1970.

Gardner, Richard. *The Boys and Girls Book About One Parent Families.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1978.

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